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Fabian Tract No. 41.

THE FABIAN SOCIETY :

ITS EARLY HISTORY.

By G. BERNARD SHAW.

A PAPER READ AT A CONFERENCE OF THE LONDON AND
PROVINCIAL FABIAN SOCIETIES AT ESSEX HALL ON
THE 6TH FEBRUARY, 1892,

AND ORDERED TO BE PRINTED FOR THE INFORMATION OF MEMBERS.

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THE FABIAN SOCIETY:*

*What it has done;
and
How it has done it.*

IF any delegate present thinks that the Fabian Society was wise from the hour of its birth, let him forthwith renounce that error. The Fabian wisdom, such as it is, has grown out of the Fabian experience; and our distinction, if we may claim any, lies more in our capacity for profiting by experience (a rarer faculty in politics than you might suppose) than in any natural superiority on our part to the follies of incipient Socialism. In 1883 we were content with nothing less than the prompt "reconstruction of society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities." In 1884 we were discussing whether money should be permitted under Socialism, or whether labor notes would not be a more becoming currency for us; and I myself actually debated the point with a Fabian who had elaborated a pass-book system to supersede both methods. Then we were joined by Mrs. Wilson, now one of the chief members of the Freedom Group of Kropotkinist Anarchists; and a sort of influenza of Anarchism soon spread through the society. When we issued our fortunately little-known Tract No. 4, "What Socialism Is," we divided it into two sections, one answering the question from the Collectivist and the other from the Anarchist point of view. The answer did not amount to much either way; for the tract contains nothing that was not already to be found better stated in the famous Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels.

On the Warpath.

It must not be supposed that Anarchism encountered any resistance among us on the ground of its associations with physical force. The Fabian Society was warlike in its origin: it came into existence through a schism in an earlier society for the peaceful regeneration of the race by the cultivation of perfection of individual character. Certain members of that circle, modestly feeling that the revolution would have to wait an unreasonably long time if postponed until they personally had attained perfection, set up the banner of Socialism

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militant; seceded from the Regenerators; and established themselves independently as the Fabian Society. That was how the Fabian began; and although exactly the same practical vein which had led its founders to insist on an active policy afterwards made them the most resolute opponents of Insurrectionism, the Constitutionalism which now distinguishes us was as unheard-of at the Fabian meetings in 1884 and 1885 as at the demonstrations of the Social-Democratic Federation or the Socialist League. For example, in 1885, a conflict with the Government arose over the right of free speech at Dod Street—a conflict precisely similar to that now [February 1892] on hand at the World's End, Chelsea. But nobody dreamt of giving the Fabian delegate to the Vigilance Committee of 1885 the strict instructions which bind the delegates of 1892 to use all their influence to avert a conflict with the police. He was simply to throw himself into the struggle on the side of the Socialists, and take the consequences. In short, we were for a year or two just as Anarchistic as the Socialist League and just as insurrectionary as the Federation. It will at once be asked why, in that case, we did not join them instead of forming a separate society. Well, the apparent reason was that we were then middle-class all through, rank and file as well as leaders, whereas the League and Federation were quite proletarian in their rank and file. But whatever weight this sort of consideration may have had with our members in general, it had none with our leaders, most of whom, indeed, were active members of the Federation as well. It undoubtedly prevented working-men from joining the Fabian whilst we were holding our meetings in one another's drawing-rooms; but it did not prevent any Fabian worth counting from joining the working-class organizations. The true cause of the separation lay deeper. Differences, which afterwards became explicit and definite, were latent from the first in the temperament and character of the Fabians. When I myself, on the point of joining the Social-Democratic Federation, changed my mind and joined the Fabian instead, I was guided by no discoverable difference in program or principles, but solely by an instinctive feeling that the Fabian and not the Federation would attract the men of my own bias and intellectual habits who were then ripening for the work that lay before us.

However, as I have said, in 1885 our differences were latent or instinctive; and we denounced the capitalists as thieves at the Industrial Remuneration Conference, and, among ourselves, talked revolution, anarchism, labor notes *versus* pass-books, and all the rest of it, on the tacit assumption that the object of our campaign, with its watchwords, "EDUCATE, AGITATE, ORGANIZE," was to bring about a tremendous smash-up of existing society, to be succeeded by complete Socialism. And this meant that we had no true practical understanding either of existing society or Socialism. Without being quite definitely aware of this, we yet felt it to a certain extent all along; for it was at this period that we contracted the invaluable habit of freely laughing at ourselves which has always distinguished

us, and which has saved us from becoming hampered by the gushing enthusiasts who mistake their own emotions for public movements. From the first, such people fled after one glance at us, declaring that we were not serious. Our preference for practical suggestions and criticisms, and our impatience of all general expressions of sympathy with working-class aspirations, not to mention our way of chaffing our opponents in preference to denouncing them as enemies of the human race, repelled from us some warm-hearted and eloquent Socialists, to whom it seemed callous and cynical to be even commonly self-possessed in the presence of the sufferings upon which Socialists make war. But there was far too much equality and personal intimacy among the Fabians to allow of any member presuming to get up and preach at the rest in the fashion which the working-classes still tolerate submissively from their leaders. We knew that a certain sort of oratory was useful for "stoking up" public meetings; but we needed no stoking up, and, when any orator tried the process on us, soon made him understand that he was wasting his time and ours. I, for one, should be very sorry to lower the intellectual standard of the Fabian by making the atmosphere of its public discussions the least bit more congenial to stale declamation than it is at present. If our debates are to be kept wholesome, they cannot be too irreverent or too critical. And the irreverence, which has become traditional with us, comes down from those early days when we often talked such nonsense that we could not help laughing at ourselves.

Tory Gold at the 1885 Election.

When I add that in 1885 we had only 40 members, you will be able to form a sufficient notion of the Fabian Society in its nonage. In that year there occurred an event which developed the latent differences between ourselves and the Social-Democratic Federation. The Federation said then, as it still says, that its policy is founded on a recognition of the existence of a Class War. How far the fact of the working classes being at war with the proprietary classes justifies them in suspending the observance of the ordinary social obligations in dealing with them was never settled; but at that time we were decidedly less scrupulous than we are now in our ideas on the subject; and we all said freely that as gunpowder destroyed the feudal system, so the capitalist system could not long survive the invention of dynamite. Not that we were dynamitards: indeed the absurdity of the inference shows how innocent we were of any practical acquaintance with explosives; but we thought that the statement about gunpowder and feudalism was historically true, and that it would do the capitalists good to remind them of it. Suddenly, however, the Federation made a very startling practical application of the Class War doctrine. They did not blow anybody up; but in the general election of 1885 they ran two candidates in London—Mr. Williams, in Hampstead, who got 27 votes, and Mr. Fielding, in Kennington, who got 32 votes. And they made no secret of the fact

that the expenses of these elections had been paid by one of the established political parties in order to split the vote of the other. From the point of view of the abstract moralist there was nothing to be said against the transaction ; since it was evident that Socialist statesmanship must for a long time to come consist largely of taking advantage of the party dissensions between the Unsocialists. It may easily happen to-morrow that the Liberal party may offer to contribute to the expenses of a Fabian candidate in a hopelessly Tory stronghold, in order to substantiate its pretensions to encourage Labor representation. Under such circumstances it is quite possible that we may say to the Fabian in question, Accept by all means ; and deliver propagandist addresses all over the place. Suppose that the Liberal party offers to bear part of Mr. Sidney Webb's expenses at the forthcoming County Council election at Deptford, as they undoubtedly will, by means of the usual National Liberal Club subscription, in the case of the poorer Labor candidates. Mr. Webb, as a matter of personal preference for an independence which he is fortunately able to afford, will refuse. But suppose Mr. Webb were not in that fortunate position, as some Labor candidates will not be ! It is quite certain that not the smallest odium would attach to the acceptance of a Liberal grant-in-aid. Now the idea that taking Tory money is worse than taking Liberal money is clearly a Liberal party idea and not a Social-Democratic one. In 1885 there was not the slightest excuse for regarding the Tory party as any more hostile to Socialism than the Liberal party ; and Mr. Hyndman's classical quotation, "*Non olet*"—"It does not smell," meaning that there is no difference in the flavor of Tory and Whig gold once it comes into the Socialist treasury, was a sufficient retort to the accusations of moral corruption which were levelled at him. But the Tory money job, as it was called, was none the less a huge mistake in tactics. Before it took place, the Federation loomed large in the imagination of the public and the political parties. This is conclusively proved by the fact that the Tories thought that the Socialists could take enough votes from the Liberals to make it worth while to pay the expenses of two Socialist candidates in London. The day after the election everyone knew that the Socialists were an absolutely negligible quantity there as far as voting power was concerned. They had presented the Tory party with 57 votes, at a cost of about £8 apiece. What was worse, they had shocked London Radicalism, to which Tory money was an utter abomination. It is hard to say which cut the more foolish figure, the Tories who had spent their money for nothing, or the Socialists who had sacrificed their reputation for worse than nothing.

The disaster was so obvious that there was an immediate falling off from the Federation, on the one hand of the sane tacticians of the movement, and on the other of those out-and-out Insurrectionists who repudiated political action altogether, and were only too glad to be able to point to a discreditable instance of it. Two resolutions were passed, one by the Socialist League and the other by the Fabian Society. Here is the Fabian resolution :

"That the conduct of the Council of the Social-Democratic Federation in accepting money from the Tory party in payment of the election expenses of Socialist candidates is calculated to disgrace the Socialist movement in England."—4th Dec., 1885.

Here is the resolution of the League, characteristically non-Fabian in tone :

"That this meeting of London members of the Socialist League views with indignation the action of certain members of the Social Democratic Federation in trafficking with the honor of the Socialist party, and desires to express its sympathies with that section of the body which repudiates the tactics of the disreputable gang concerned in the recent proceedings."—7th Dec., 1885.

The Unemployed Agitation.

From that time forward we were counted by the Federation as a hostile body; and we ourselves knew that we should have to find our way for ourselves without looking to the other bodies for a trustworthy lead. You will perhaps expect to hear that the immediate result was the extinction of the Federation and the advance to the front of the Fabian with its peculiar opportunist policy. But this was not so. Even those members of the Federation who seceded from it then under the leadership of C. L. Fitzgerald and J. Macdonald, never thought of joining the Fabian. They formed in Feb. 1886 a new body called "The Socialist Union," which barely managed to keep breathing for two years. Still, it suited them better than the Fabian. The fact is, 1886 and 1887 were not favorable years for drawing room Socialism and scientific politics. They were years of great distress among the working classes—years for street-corner agitators to marshal columns of hollow-cheeked men with red flags and banners inscribed with Scriptural texts to fashionable churches on Sunday, and to lead desperate deputations from the Holborn Board of Guardians to the Local Government Board office and back again, using stronger language at each official rebuff from pillar to post. These were the days when Mr. Champion told a meeting in London Fields that if the whole propertied class had but one throat he would cut it without a second thought, if by doing so he could redress the injustices of our social system; and when Mr. Hyndman was expelled from his club for declaring on the Thames Embankment that there would be some attention paid to cases of starvation if a rich man were immolated on every pauper's tomb. Besides these London gatherings, there were meetings of the unemployed, not always unaccompanied by window-breaking, in Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester, Yarmouth, and many of the large towns throughout the country. Matters were much the same in Holland and Belgium. In America the Eight Hours Movement, intensified by the distress of the unemployed, who were estimated at a million strong in the United States, led to riots in April 1886,

culminating on the 4th May with the famous Chicago meeting where the bomb was thrown which led to the hanging of four Anarchists. In London the police supervision of the meetings was sufficient to prevent any violence until Monday, 8th February 1886, when a Sugar Bounty meeting was held in Trafalgar Square. It was swamped by a huge crowd of the unemployed. The Federation orators, who were present, seized the opportunity to hold a counter demonstration; after which there was an adjournment to Hyde Park. Unfortunately, on this occasion the police, through some blunder in telephoning or the like, received orders to proceed, not to Pall Mall, but to *The Mall*. Accordingly, they were shivering in St. James's Park whilst the unemployed were passing through the street of rich men's clubs. The rich men crowded to the windows to see the poor men pass along; and Dives, not noticing the absence of the police, mocked Lazarus. Lazarus thereupon broke Dives's windows, and even looted a shop or two, besides harmlessly storming the carriage of a tactless lady near the Achilles statue. Hyndman, Champion, Burns and Williams were arrested and tried for this affair; but there were one or two good men on the jury, notably a Christian Socialist named Crickmay; our friend Sparling was proved by himself and others to have used the most terrible of the phrases for which Burns was indicted; and what with these advantages and the unimpeachable gentility of two of the defendants, all four were acquitted. This was a great success, especially as the Mansion House Fund for the relief of the unemployed had gone up with a bound from £30,000 to £79,000 after the window breaking. The agitation went on more violently than ever afterwards; and the restless activity of Champion, seconded by Burns's formidable oratory, seized on every public opportunity, from the Lord Mayor's Show to services for the poor in Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's, to parade the unemployed and force their claims upon the attention of the public. A commercial firm attempted to make a census of the unemployed in order to advertize themselves; the *Pall Mall Gazette* tried also; and matters looked very gloomy indeed when Champion, impatient of doing nothing but marching hungry men about the streets and making stale speeches to them, offered the Federation the alternative of either empowering him to negotiate some scheme of relief with his aristocratic sympathizers, or else going to Trafalgar Square and staying there day and night until something should happen—the something being perhaps the best available attempt at a revolution possible under the circumstances. The Federation refused both alternatives; and Champion withdrew from the agitation in disgust. A long-brewing dissension between Burns and Hyndman also came to a head about this time; and the result was that the unemployed agitation was left almost leaderless at the moment when the unemployed themselves were getting most desperate. Early in the winter of 1887 the men themselves, under all sorts of casual leaders, or rather speechmakers, took to meeting constantly in Trafalgar Square, thus taking up Champion's alternative for want of anything else to do. Champion, however,

was gone ; and the shopkeepers began to complain that the sensational newspaper accounts of the meetings were frightening away their customers and endangering the Christmas quarter's rent. On this the newspapers became more sensational than ever ; and those fervid orators who preserve friendly relations with the police began to throw in the usual occasional proposal to set London on fire simultaneously at the Bank, St. Paul's, the House of Commons, the Stock Exchange, and the Tower. This helped to keep the pot boiling ; and at last the police cleared the unemployed out of the Square. Immediately the whole working-class political organization of London rallied to the defence of the right of meeting. The affair of 1866, when the railings of Hyde Park were thrown down and the right of meeting there vindicated, and the Free Speech triumph at Dod Street, were precedents in favor of the people. The papers which declared that the workers had an excellent forum in Hyde Park without obstructing Trafalgar Square, were reminded that in 1866 the convenience of Trafalgar Square for public meetings was made an excuse for the attempt to put down meetings in the Park. Mr. Stead, who was then editing the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and who, with all his enthusiasm, had about as much practical knowledge of how to do the Dod Street trick* as a London tram-conductor has of conducting classical concerts, gave the word "To the Square!" To the Square we all went, therefore, with drums beating and banners waving, in our tens of thousands, nominally to protest against the Irish policy of the Government, but really to maintain the right of meeting in the Square. The meeting had been proclaimed ; but the authority cited was an Act for the Regulation of Traffic which clearly gave no power to the police to prohibit processions, and which was abandoned by the Government when they had to justify their action in court. However, the new Chief Commissioner of Police, successor to him who had been dismissed for making that mistake in the previous year about Pall Mall, had no notion of sharing his predecessor's fate. He took no half measures in the matter : there was no reading of the Riot Act, or calling on the processions to disperse, as they had arranged to do peacefully and constitutionally if so ordered. It was, as one of Bunyan's pilgrims put it, but a word and a blow with him ; for the formal summons to disperse was

* It may be useful to say here that "the way to do the Dod Street trick" is simply to find a dozen or more persons who are willing to get arrested at the rate of one per week by speaking in defiance of the police. In a month or two, the repeated arrests, the crowds which they attract, the scenes which they provoke, the sentences passed by the magistrates and at the sessions, and the consequent newspaper descriptions, rouse sufficient public feeling to force the Home Secretary to give way whenever the police are clearly in the wrong. Mr. Matthews, victorious in Trafalgar Square, has been completely beaten at the World's End, Chelsea, by this method since the above paper was read. The method, however, is extremely hard on the martyrs, who suffer severely, and get no compensation, and but little thanks.

accompanied by a vigorous baton charge, before which the processionists, though outnumbering their assailants by a hundred to one, fled in the utmost confusion and terror. That eventful 13th November 1887 has since been known as "Bloody Sunday." The heroes of it were Burns and Cunninghame Graham, who charged, two strong, at the rampart of policemen round the Square and were overpowered and arrested. The heroine was Mrs. Besant, who may be said without the slightest exaggeration to have all but killed herself with overwork in looking after the prisoners, and organizing on their behalf a "Law and Liberty League" with Mr. Stead. Meanwhile the police received the blessing of Mr. Gladstone; and Insurrectionism, after a two years' innings, vanished from the field and has not since been much heard of. For, in the middle of the revengeful growling over the defeat at the Square, trade revived; the unemployed were absorbed; the *Star* newspaper appeared to let in light and let off steam: in short, the way was clear at last for Fabianism. Do not forget, though, that Insurrectionism will reappear at the next depression of trade as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow morning.*

The Fabian Conference of 1886.

You will now ask to be told what the Fabians had been doing all this time. Well, I think it must be admitted that we were overlooked in the excitements of the unemployed agitation, which had, moreover, caused the Tory money affair to be forgotten. The Fabians were disgracefully backward in open-air speaking. Up to quite a recent date, Graham Wallas, myself, and Mrs. Besant were the only representative open-air speakers in the Society, whereas the Federation speakers, Burns, Hyndman, Andrew Hall, Tom Mann, Champion, Burrows, with the Socialist Leaguers, were at it constantly. On the whole, the Church Parades and the rest were not in our line; and we were not wanted by the men who were organizing them. Our only contribution to the agitation was a report which we printed in 1886, which recommended experiments in tobacco culture, and even hinted at compulsory military service, as means of absorbing some of the unskilled unemployed, but which went carefully into the practical conditions of relief works. Indeed, we are at present trying to produce a new tract on the subject without finding ourselves able to improve very materially on the old one in this respect. It was drawn up by Bland, Hughes, Podmore, Stapelton, and Webb, and was the first of our publications that contained any solid information. Its tone, however, was moderate and its style somewhat conventional; and the Society was still in so hot a temper on the

* This is the sentence which led a London evening newspaper (*The Echo*) to denounce the author in unmeasured terms for inciting the unemployed to armed rebellion. The incident is worth mentioning as an example of the ordinary Press criticism of Socialist utterances.

social question that we refused to adopt it as a regular Fabian tract, and only issued it as a report printed for the information of members. Nevertheless we were coming to our senses rapidly by this time. We signalized our repudiation of political sectarianism in June, 1886, by inviting the Radicals, the Secularists, and anyone else who would come, to a great conference, modelled upon the Industrial Remuneration Conference, and dealing with the Nationalization of Land and Capital. It fully established the fact that we had nothing immediately practical to impart to the Radicals and that they had nothing to impart to us. The proceedings were fully reported for us; but we never had the courage even to read the shorthand writer's report, which still remains in MS. Before I refreshed my memory on the subject the other day, I had a vague notion that the Conference cost a great deal of money; that it did no good whatever; that Mr. Bradlaugh made a speech; that Mrs. Fenwick Miller, who had nothing on earth to do with us, was in the chair during part of the proceedings; and that the most successful paper was by a strange gentleman whom we had taken on trust as a Socialist, but who turned out to be an enthusiast on the subject of building more harbors. I find, however, on looking up the facts, that no less than fifty-three societies sent delegates; that the guarantee fund for expenses was £100; and that the discussions were kept going for three afternoons and three evenings. The Federation boycotted us; but the *Times* reported us. Eighteen papers were read, two of them by members of Parliament, and most of the rest by well-known people. William Morris and Dr. Aveling read papers as delegates from the Socialist League; the National Secular Society sent Mr. Foote and Mr. Robertson, the latter contributing a "Scheme of Taxation" in which he anticipated much of what was subsequently adopted as the Fabian program; Wordsworth Donisthorpe took the field for Anarchism of the type advocated by the authors of "A Plea for Liberty"; Stewart Headlam spoke for Christian Socialism and the Guild of St. Matthew; Dr. Pankhurst dealt with the situation from the earlier Radical point of view; and various Socialist papers were read by Mrs. Besant, Sidney Webb, and Edward Carpenter, besides one by Stuart-Glennie, who subsequently left us because we fought shy of the Marriage Question when revising our "Basis." I mention all this in order to shew you how much more important this abortive Conference looked than the present one. Yet all that can be said for it is that it made us known to the Radical clubs and proved that we were able to manage a conference in a businesslike way. It also, by the way, shewed off our pretty prospectus with the design by Crane at the top, our stylish-looking blood-red invitation cards, and the other little smartnesses on which we then prided ourselves. We used to be plentifully sneered at as fops and armchair Socialists for our attention to these details; but I think it was by no means the least of our merits that we always, as far as our means permitted, tried to make our printed documents as handsome as possible, and did

our best to destroy the association between revolutionary literature and slovenly printing on paper that is nasty without being cheap. One effect of this was that we were supposed to be much richer than we really were, because we generally got better value and a finer show for our money than the other Socialist societies.

The Fabian Parliamentary League.

The Conference was the last of our follies. We had now a very strong Executive Committee, including Mrs. Besant, who in June 1885 had effected her public profession of Socialism by joining the Fabian. Five out of the seven authors of "Fabian Essays," which were of course still unwritten, were at the helm by 1887. But by 1886 we had already found that we were of one mind as to the advisability of setting to work by the ordinary political methods and having done with Anarchism and vague exhortations to Emancipate the Workers. We had several hot debates on the subject with a section of the Socialist League which called itself Anti-State Communist, a name invented by Mr. Joseph Lane of that body. William Morris, who was really a free democrat of the Kropotkin type, backed up Lane, and went for us tooth and nail. Records of our warfare may be found in the volumes of the extinct magazine called *To-Day*, which was then edited by Hubert Bland; and they are by no means bad reading. We soon began to see that at the debates the opposition to us came from members of the Socialist League, who were present only as visitors. The question was, how many followers had our one ascertained Anarchist, Mrs. Wilson, among the silent Fabians. Bland and Mrs. Besant brought this question to an issue on the 17th September, 1886, at a meeting in Anderton's Hotel, by respectively seconding and moving the following resolution :

"That it is advisable that Socialists should organize themselves as a political party for the purpose of transferring into the hands of the whole working community full control over the soil and the means of production, as well as over the production and distribution of wealth."

To this a rider was moved by William Morris as follows :

"But whereas the first duty of Socialists is to educate the people to understand what their present position is, and what their future might be, and to keep the principle of Socialism steadily before them; and whereas no Parliamentary party can exist without compromise and concession, which would hinder that education and obscure those principles, it would be a false step for Socialists to attempt to take part in the Parliamentary contest."

I shall not attempt to describe the debate, in which Morris, Mrs. Wilson, Davis, and Tochatti did battle with Burns, Mrs. Besant, Bland, Shaw, Donald, and Rossiter: that is, with Fabian and S.D.F.

combined. Suffice it to say that the minutes of the meeting close with the following significant note by the secretary:

“Subsequently to the meeting, the secretary received notice from the manager of Anderton’s Hotel that the Society could not be accommodated there for any further meetings.”

Everybody voted, whether Fabian or not; and Mrs. Besant and Bland carried their resolution by 47 to 19, Morris’s rider being subsequently rejected by 40 to 27.

I must not linger over those high old times, tempting as they are. In order to avoid a breach with the Fabians who sympathized with Mrs. Wilson, we proceeded to form a separate body within the society, called the Fabian Parliamentary League, which any Fabian could join or not as he pleased. I am afraid I must read you at full length the preliminary manifesto of this body. It is dated February, 1887:

MANIFESTO OF THE FABIAN PARLIAMENTARY LEAGUE.

The Fabian Parliamentary League is composed of Socialists who believe that Socialism may be most quickly and most surely realized by utilizing the political power already possessed by the people. The progress of the Socialist party in the German Reichstag, in the Legislatures of the United States, and in the Paris Municipal Council, not only proves the possibility of a Socialist party in Parliament, but renders it imperative on English Socialists to set energetically about the duty of giving effect in public affairs to the growing influence of Socialist opinion in this country.

The League will endeavor to organize Socialist opinion, and to bring it to bear upon Parliament, municipalities, and other representative bodies; it will, by lectures and publications, seek to deal with the political questions of the day, analysing the ultimate tendencies of measures as well as their immediate effects, and working for or against proposed measures of social reform according as they tend towards, or away from, the Socialist ideal.

The League will take active part in all general and local elections. Until a fitting opportunity arises for putting forward Socialist candidates to form the nucleus of a Socialist party in Parliament, it will confine itself to supporting those candidates who will go furthest in the direction of Socialism. It will not ally itself absolutely with any political party; it will jealously avoid being made use of for party purposes; and it will be guided in its action by the character, record, and pledges of the candidates before the constituencies. In Municipal, School Board, Vestry, and other local elections, the League will, as it finds itself strong enough, run candidates of its own, and by placing trustworthy Socialists on local representative bodies it will endeavor to secure the recognition of the Socialist principle in all the details of local government.

It will be the duty of members of the League, in every borough, to take active part in the public work of their districts; and to this end they should organize themselves into a Branch of the League. They should appoint a secretary to keep lists of all annual and other elections in his dis-

strict and of all candidates; to attend to the registration of Socialists; to watch the public conduct of all officials, and keep a record thereof for guidance at future elections; to enlist volunteers for special work, and generally to act as a centre of the organization. Individual members should write to their Parliamentary representatives on any Bill on which the League takes action; should take every opportunity of defending and advocating Socialism in their local press; should visit the workhouses of their neighborhood; and should exercise a careful supervision of local funds. By steady work on these and similar lines, Socialists will increase their power in the community, and will before long be able to influence effectively the course of public opinion.

Socialists willing to co-operate should communicate with J. Brailsford Bright, hon. sec. of the Fabian Parliamentary League, 34 Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, E.C., who will give full details as to the method of organizing a Branch of the League.

THE COUNCIL OF THE

February, 1887.

FABIAN PARLIAMENTARY LEAGUE.

RULES OF THE LEAGUE.

1. That the name of the Society be The Fabian Parliamentary League.
2. That the minimum subscription be 2s. 6d. per annum.
3. That at the annual general meeting the Society shall elect a Council, which shall hold office for one year, the secretary or secretaries, and the treasurer being appointed at the same meeting.
4. That each Branch shall appoint a member to serve on the Council.
5. That meetings of the members of the League shall be held at least once in every three months, and on such other occasions as the Council shall think necessary.

Here you have the first sketch of the Fabian policy of to-day. The Parliamentary League, however, was a short-lived affair. Mrs. Wilson's followers faded away, either by getting converted or leaving us. Indeed, it is a question with us to this day whether they did not owe their existence solely to our own imaginations. Anyhow, it soon became plain that the Society was solidly with the Executive on the subject of political action, and that there was no need for any separate organization at all. The League first faded into a Political Committee of the Society, and then merged silently and painlessly into the general body. During its separate existence it issued two tracts, a criticism of seven Bills then before Parliament, and "The True Radical Programme," which still survives in an up-to-date form as our Tract No. 11, "The Workers' Political Program." One other point about the League must be noted. Mrs. Besant tried to form provincial branches of it; and some such branches did draw breath for a moment here and there in the country. I have not the least idea what became of them, nor is any one present, I venture to say, wiser than I in the matter. This failure was not to be wondered at; for outside Socialist circles

in London the Society remained unknown. It was still unable to bring up its roll of members to a hundred names; and its funds were so modest that nobody ever thought of proposing that we should keep a banking account or rent an office. In fact, we were literally passing rich on £40 a year. There may be among the delegates of the younger Societies represented here, one or two who stand in some awe of the London Society. It may do them good to know that the Birmingham Fabian Society, on the very first day of its existence, was more numerous and more prosperous pecuniarily than the London Society was until quite the other day; and I daresay the same is true of other provincial Fabian bodies. If ever there was a Society which lived by its wits, and by its wits alone, that Society was the Fabian.

Socialism "Equipped with All the Culture of the Age."

By far our most important work at this period was our renewal of that historic and economic equipment of Social-Democracy of which Ferdinand Lassalle boasted, and which had been getting rustier and more obsolete ever since his time and that of his contemporary Karl Marx. In the earlier half of this century, when these two leaders were educated, all the Socialists in Europe were pouncing on Ricardo's demonstration of the tendency of wages to fall to bare subsistence, and on his labor theory of value, believing that they constituted a scientific foundation for Socialism; and the truth is that since that bygone time no Socialist (unless we count Ruskin) had done twopennyworth of economic thinking, or made any attempt to keep us up to date in the scientific world. In 1885 we used to prate about Marx's theory of value and Lassalle's Iron Law of Wages as if it were still 1870. In spite of Henry George, no Socialist seemed to have any working knowledge of the theory of economic rent: its application to skilled labor was so unheard-of that the expression "rent of ability" was received with laughter when the Fabians first introduced it into their lectures and discussions; and as for the modern theory of value, it was scouted as a blasphemy against Marx, with regard to whom the Social-Democratic Federation still maintains a Dogma of Finality and Infallibility which has effectually prevented it from making a single contribution to the economics of Socialism since its foundation. As to history, we had a convenient stock of imposing generalizations about the evolution from slavery to serfdom and from serfdom to free wage labor. We drew our pictures of society with one broad line dividing the bourgeoisie from the proletariat, and declared that there were only two classes really in the country. We gave lightning sketches of the development of the medieval craftsman into the manufacturer and finally into the factory hand. We denounced Malthusianism quite as crudely as the Malthusians advocated it, which is saying a good deal; and we raged against emigration, National Insurance,

Co-operation, Trade-Unionism, old-fashioned Radicalism, and everything else that was not Socialism; and that, too, without knowing at all clearly what we meant by Socialism. The mischief was, not that our generalizations were unsound, but that we had no detailed knowledge of the content of them: we had borrowed them ready-made as articles of faith; and when opponents like Charles Bradlaugh asked us for details we sneered at the demand without being in the least able to comply with it. The real reason why Anarchist and Socialist worked then shoulder to shoulder as comrades and brothers was that neither one nor the other had any definite idea of what he wanted or how it was to be got. All this is true to this day of the raw recruits of the movement, and of some older hands who may be absolved on the ground of invincible ignorance; but it is no longer true of the leaders of the movement in general. In 1887 even the British Association burst out laughing as one man when an elderly representative of Philosophic Radicalism, with the air of one who was uttering the safest of platitudes, accused us of ignorance of political economy; and now not even a Philosophic Radical is to be found to make himself ridiculous in this way. The exemplary eye-opening of Mr. Leonard Courtney by Mr. Sidney Webb lately in the leading English economic review surprised nobody, except perhaps Mr. Courtney himself. The cotton lords of the north would never dream to-day of engaging an economist to confute us with learned pamphlets as their predecessors engaged Nassau Senior in the days of the Ten Hours Bill, because they know that we should be only too glad to advertize our Eight Hours Bill by flattening out any such champion. From 1887 to 1889 we were the recognized bullies and swashbucklers of advanced economies.

How to Train for Public Life.

Now this, as you may imagine, was not done without study; and as that study could not possibly be carried on by the men who were organizing the unemployed agitation in the streets, the Fabians had a monopoly of it. We had to study where we could and how we could. I need not repeat the story of the Hampstead Historic Club, founded by a handful of us to read Marx and Proudhon, and afterwards turned into a systematic history class in which each student took his turn at being professor. My own experience may be taken as typical. For some years I attended the Hampstead Historic Club once a fortnight, and spent a night in the alternate weeks at a private circle of economists which has since blossomed into the British Economic Association—a circle where the social question was left out, and the work kept on abstract scientific lines. I made all my acquaintances think me madder than usual by the pertinacity with which I attended debating societies and haunted all sorts of hole-and-corner debates and public meetings and made speeches at them. I was President of the Local Government Board at an amateur Parliament where a Fabian ministry had to put its proposals into black-and-white in the shape of Parliamentary Bills. Every Sunday

I lectured on some subject which I wanted to teach to myself ; and it was not until I had come to the point of being able to deliver separate lectures, without notes, on Rent, Interest, Profits, Wages, Toryism, Liberalism, Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, Trade-Unionism, Co-operation, Democracy, the Division of Society into Classes, and the Suitability of Human Nature to Systems of Just Distribution, that I was able to handle Social-Democracy as it must be handled before it can be preached in such a way as to present it to every sort of man from his own particular point of view. In old lecture lists of the Society you will find my name down for twelve different lectures or so. Nowadays I have only one, for which the secretary is good enough to invent four or five different names. Sometimes I am asked for one of the old ones, to my great dismay, as I forget all about them ; but I get out of the difficulty by delivering the new one under the old name, which does as well. I do not hesitate to say that all our best lecturers have two or three old lectures at the back of every single point in their best new speeches ; and this means that they have spent a certain number of years plodding away at footling little meetings and dull discussions, doggedly placing these before all private engagements, however tempting. A man's Socialistic acquisitiveness must be keen enough to make him actually prefer spending two or three nights a week in speaking and debating, or in picking up social information even in the most dingy and scrappy way, to going to the theatre, or dancing or drinking, or even sweethearting, if he is to become a really competent propagandist—unless, of course, his daily work is of such a nature as to be in itself a training for political life ; and that, we know, is the case with very few of us indeed. It is at such lecturing and debating work, and on squalid little committees and ridiculous little delegations to conferences of the three tailors of Tooley Street, with perhaps a deputation to the Mayor thrown in once in a blue moon or so, that the ordinary Fabian workman or clerk must qualify for his future seat on the Town Council, the School Board, or perhaps in the Cabinet. It was in that way that Bradlaugh, for instance, graduated from being a boy evangelist to being one of the most formidable debaters in the House of Commons. And the only opponents who have ever held their own against the Fabians in debate have been men like Mr. Levy or Mr. Foote, who learnt in the same school.

Collaring the “Star.”

Now let me return from this digression as to how we grounded ourselves in the historic, economic and moral bearings of Socialism, to consider the consequences of our newly acquired proficiency. The first effect was, as we have already seen, to make us conscious that we were neither Anarchists nor Insurrectionists. We demolished Anarchism in the abstract by grinding it between human nature and the theory of economic rent ; and when, driven in disgrace out of Anderton's Hotel, and subsequently out of a chapel near Wardour

Street in which we had taken refuge, we went to Willis's Rooms, the most aristocratic, and also, as it turned out, the cheapest place of meeting in London, our favorite sport was inviting politicians and economists to lecture to us, and then falling on them with all our erudition and debating skill, and making them wish they had never been born. The curious may consult the files of Mr. George Standring's extinct journal, called *The Radical*, for a graphic account, written by an individualist, of the fate of a well-known member of Parliament who was lured into our web on one of these occasions. The article is suggestively entitled, "Butchered to make a Fabian Holiday." We also confuted Co-operation in the person of Mr. Benjamin Jones on a point on which we now see reason to believe that we were entirely in the wrong, and he entirely in the right.

The butchery of the M.P. took place on the 16th March, 1888, four months after the rout at Trafalgar Square. Trade had revived; and with the disappearance of the unemployed the occupation of the Federation was gone. Champion was trying to organize a Labor party with a new paper; Burns, just out of prison for the Square affair, was getting into political harness at Battersea; and the *Star* newspaper was started. We collared the *Star* by a stage-army stratagem, and before the year was out had the assistant editor, Mr. H. W. Massingham, writing as extreme articles as Hyndman had ever written in *Justice*. Before the capitalist proprietors woke up to our game and cleared us out, the competition of the *Star*, which was immensely popular under what I may call the Fabian régime, had encouraged a morning daily, the *Chronicle*, to take up the running; and the *Star*, when it tried to go back, found that it could not do so further than to Gladstonize its party politics. On other questions it remained and remains far more advanced than the wildest Socialist three years before ever hoped to see a capitalist paper. Nowadays even the *Daily News* has its Labor column, although five years ago the editor would as soon have thought of setting aside a column for Freethinkers.

Permeating the Liberals.

However, I must not anticipate. In 1888 we had not been found out even by the *Star*. The Liberal party was too much preoccupied over Mr. O'Brien's breeches and the Parnell Commission, with its dramatic climax in the suicide of the forger Pigott, to suspect that the liveliness of the extreme left of the Radical wing in London meant anything but the usual humbug about working-class interests. We now adopted a policy which snapped the last tie between our methods and the sectarianism of the Federation. We urged our members to join the Liberal and Radical Associations of their districts, or, if they preferred it, the Conservative Associations. We told them to become members of the nearest Radical Club and Co-operative Store, and to get delegated to the Metropolitan Radical Federation and the Liberal and Radical Union if possible. On these bodies we made speeches and moved resolutions, or, better still, got

the Parliamentary candidate for the constituency to move them, and secured reports and encouraging little articles for him in the *Star*. We permeated the party organizations and pulled all the wires we could lay our hands on with our utmost adroitness and energy; and we succeeded so far that in 1888 we gained the solid advantage of a Progressive majority, full of ideas that would never have come into their heads had not the Fabian put them there, on the first London County Council. The generalship of this movement was undertaken chiefly by Sidney Webb, who played such bewildering conjuring tricks with the Liberal thimbles and the Fabian peas, that to this day both the Liberals and the sectarian Socialists stand aghast at him. It was exciting whilst it lasted, all this "permeation of the Liberal party," as it was called; and no person with the smallest political intelligence is likely to deny that it made a foothold for us in the press and pushed forward Socialism in municipal politics to an extent which can only be appreciated by those who remember how things stood before our campaign. When we published "Fabian Essays" at the end of 1889, having ventured with great misgiving on a subscription edition of a thousand, it went off like smoke; and our cheap edition brought up the circulation to about twenty thousand. In the meantime we had been cramming the public with information in tracts, on the model of our earliest financial success in that department, namely, "Facts for Socialists," the first edition of which actually brought us a profit—the only instance of the kind then known. In short, the years 1888, 1889, 1890 saw a Fabian boom, the reverberation of which in the provinces at last produced the local Fabian societies which are represented here to-night. And I now come to the most important part of this paper; for I must at once tell you that we are here, not to congratulate ourselves on the continuance of that boom, but to face the fact that it is over, and that the time has come for a new departure.

One day, about a year ago, a certain "Liberal and Radical" London member of Parliament, having been coaxed by Webb to the point of admitting that his aims were exactly those of the Socialists, namely, the extinction of incomes derived from privately appropriated rent and interest, and that it was therefore his high destiny to lead the working-classes along the path of progress, was asked to get to business. Thereupon he made the discovery that he was not a Socialist and that Webb was. The intelligence spread with remarkable rapidity to all the official Liberals who had been reached by the Fabian influence; and the word was promptly given to close up the ranks of Capitalism against the insidious invaders. As in the case of the *Star* newspaper, the discovery came too late. It is only necessary to compare the Nottingham program of the National Liberal Federation for 1887 with the Newcastle program for 1891, or to study the Liberal and Radical Union program for the 1892 London County Council election, to appreciate the extent to which the policy of permeating the party organizations with Socialism had succeeded. The official leaders of the Liberal party cannot now turn

their followers back : they can only refuse to lead them and sit as tight as they can under the circumstances. The Radicals are at last conscious that the leaders are obstructing them ; and they are now looking for a lead in attacking the obstruction. They say to us, in effect, " Your policy of permeating has been successful : we *are* permeated ; and the result is that we find all the money and all the official power of our leaders, who are not permeated and cannot be permeated, arrayed against us. Now shew us how to get rid of those leaders or to fight them." I want to impress this situation on you, because there are some Rip Van Winkles in our movement who are only now waking up to the special variety of permeating work which was begun in 1886 and finished in 1890, and who, now that it is over and done with as far as the London Fabian is concerned, are protesting loudly against its being begun. No doubt there still remains, in London as everywhere else, a vast mass of political raw material, calling itself Liberal, Radical, Tory, Labor, and what not, or even not calling itself anything at all, which is ready to take the Fabian stamp if it is adroitly and politely pressed down on it. There are thousands of thoroughly Socialized Radicals to-day who would have resisted Socialism fiercely if it had been forced on them with taunts, threats, and demands that they should recant all their old professions and commit what they regard as an act of political apostasy. And there are thousands more, not yet Socialized, who must be dealt with in the same manner. But whilst our propaganda is thus still chiefly a matter of permeation, that game is played out in our politics. As long ago as 1889 we plainly said, in the last Fabian Essay—Bland's " Political Outlook"—that the moment the party leaders realized what we were driving at, they would rally round all the institutions we were attacking, even at the cost of coalescing with their rivals for office, unless they could put us off more cheaply by raising false issues such as Leaseholds Enfranchisement, Disestablishment of the Church, or bogus " endings or mendings " of their cherished bulwark the House of Lords. We now feel that we have brought up all the political laggards and pushed their parties as far as they can be pushed, and that we have therefore cleared the way to the beginning of the special political work of the Socialist—that of forming a Collectivist party of those who have more to gain than to lose by Collectivism, solidly arrayed against those who have more to lose than to gain by it. That is the real subject of this Conference. Whether the time is ripe now or not, to that it must come at last ; for even the most patient Fabians are growing anxious to make their position clear and to escape from the suspicion of being a mere left wing of the party which rallies round Messrs. Bryant & May's statue to Mr. Gladstone. We are especially loth to let the forthcoming general election pass without making it known that the eight years' work which I am sketching for you in this paper was not done for the sake of the sweaters and place-hunters who will presently be claiming the credit of it at the polls. Not that we would hesitate to let the credit go for the moment to any quarter, however venal, from which we could get a fair return

in substantial concessions to our cause; but in this instance we believe that our natural inclinations and our political interests point to the same course, that of making it understood that Fabianism is neither official Liberalism nor official Toryism, but an intelligent Collectivism that will eventually wear down both.

The Tactics of the Social - Democratic Federation.

And now, some of you will be inclined to ask whether this does not mean that we have at last come round to the views of the Social-Democratic Federation? The reply is that our *views* have always been the same as those of that body. On the 29th February, 1884, Mr. Bland moved at a Fabian meeting the following resolution:

“That whilst not entirely agreeing with all the statements and phrases used in the pamphlets of the Democratic Federation and in the speeches of Mr. Hyndman, this Society considers that the Democratic Federation is doing a good and useful work and is worthy of sympathy and support.”

That was carried *nem. con.*; and it would no doubt be carried unanimously here this evening if Mr. Bland were to move it again. But we did not proceed to amalgamate with them in 1884 any more than we shall to-night. Our organization and our methods are radically different; and the experience of the past eight years has strengthened our preference for our own and confirmed our objection to theirs. Let me enumerate a few of the differences. In the first place, the Fabian Society is a society for helping to bring about the Socialization of the industrial resources of the country. The Social-Democratic Federation is a society for enlisting the whole proletariat of the country in its own ranks and itself Socializing the national industry. The Federation persistently claims to be the only genuine representative of working-class interests in England. It counts no man a Socialist until he has joined it, and supports no candidate who is not a member. If one of its speakers supports an outside candidate, he is disowned. Only the other day the Executive Council of the Federation proposed that no member should even vote for any candidate not enrolled in its ranks.* The Federation chooses its own candidates without consulting its neighbors, and sends them to the poll, when it has the money, without the slightest regard to the possibility of such a course making a present of the seat to the least Socialistic candidate in the field. This implacably sectarian policy evidently depends for its success on the recruiting powers of the Society which adopts it. It was planned in the days when we all believed that Socialism had only to be explained to the working-classes to bring every working-

* This policy was finally adopted, and promulgated in the S.D.F. Manifesto issued on the occasion of the General Election in June-July, 1892. See, however the postscript to this tract.

man, not only in England but in Europe—nay, in the world—into our ranks. It would clearly be the right policy if four out of every five men in England were members of the Social-Democratic Federation. But the experience of over half a century of agitation has proved that no such result is possible. The Federation, in every centre of the population where it exists, is practically as insignificant a minority as the Fabian. The ablest working-class agitators it ever produced, John Burns and Tom Mann, had to free themselves from it the moment they gained sufficient political experience to see that a united nation of subscribers to the Social-Democratic Federation can never be anything more than a dream. A necessary part of the Federation policy is the denunciation, as misleaders of the people, of Radicals, Co-operators, Teetotallers, Trade-Unionists, Fabians, and all rival propagandists. The result of this is that the Federation branches are not merely insignificant in numbers, but unpopular as well, in spite of the admittedly stimulating effect of their meetings on the political activity of the working class. Their hand being against every outsider, every outsider's hand is naturally against them; and as the outsiders outnumber them by more than a thousand to one, they cannot get any real influence among the men who really manage the political work and organization of the working-classes, and who are of course all Co-operators, Teetotallers, Trade Unionists, or party men of one kind or another. For it is only your middle-class enthusiast who comes into the movement by reading Mazzini or Marx, without any previous experience in the only sort of organization hitherto open to working men of any organizing capacity. The net result is that wherever the Federation can shew a fair degree of success in branch work, it will be found that the branches have modified their policy in the Fabian direction. In Battersea, for instance, they were only masters of the situation whilst they followed John Burns, who, like Tom Mann, is insanely denounced by the central council as a mercenary renegade, and who, in return, makes no secret of his unbounded contempt for Federation tactics. At Manchester, too, where the Federation has had a creditable success, the branch practically repudiates the central authority by maintaining harmonious relations with the new Unionism which Burns inaugurated down at the docks here. In London the Federation would be a cipher but for the fact that it has stopped short of boycotting the Trades Council, on which it is strongly represented.

Fabian Tactics.

Now let us look at the Fabian tactics. We have never indulged in any visions of a Fabian army any bigger than a stage army. In London we have never publicly recruited except for other bodies. When I lecture for the Federation, I do not invite workmen to join the Fabian, but to join the branch for which I am lecturing. So far are we from encouraging the rush of members that has lately come

upon us, that we have actually tried to check it by insisting on stricter guarantees of the sincerity of the applicants' acceptance of our basis; and I do not hesitate to say that if it were not for the need of spreading the cost of our work over as large a number of subscribers as possible, we should be tempted to propose the limitation of our society in London to a hundred picked members. We have never advanced the smallest pretension to represent the working-classes of this country. No such absurdity as a candidate nominated by the Fabian Society alone has ever appeared in London, though we flatter ourselves that a candidate finds it no disadvantage now to be a Fabian. Although we think we can see further ahead than the mere Trade-Unionist or Co-operator, we are ready to help them loyally to take the next step ahead that lies in their path. When we go to a Radical Club to inveigh against the monopolies of land and capital, we know perfectly that we are preaching no new doctrine, and that the old hands were listening to such denunciations twenty-five years before we were born, and are only curious to know whether we have anything new in the way of a practical remedy. In short, we know that for a long time to come we can only make headway by gaining the confidence of masses of men outside our Society who will have nothing to do with us unless we first prove ourselves safe for all sorts of progressive work. For this we are denounced by the Social-Democratic Federation as compromisers of our principles, Liberal wire-pullers, and sham middle-class Socialists of the gas-and-water variety.

Again, consider our relation to the local Societies. Unlike the Federation branches, these are so perfectly independent of our control or dictation, that one of them has already tried Federation tactics at the School Board election, with the result that its candidates were thoroughly beaten and the Society effectually discredited. We insisted on this independence ourselves, seeing the advantage of each Society being able to appeal for support as an independent and autonomous local body, not committed in any way to the proceedings of people in London on whom they could have no effective check, and yet sharing the prestige and freedom from insurrectionary associations of the Fabian name. Suppose we reversed this policy, and made the whole set of Fabian Societies into a Fabian Federation on the S.D.F. plan. They would all become the slaves of a council here in London on which they could not be represented. For though they would be entitled to have delegates on it, yet as they could not afford to pay the expenses of these delegates up and down for every council meeting, they would have to fall back on the S.D.F. or Trade-Union plan of asking London members to represent them, which would produce that worst form of pseudo-democratic slavery which consists in the appearance of representation without the reality of it.

Take another point. The Federation runs a newspaper called *Justice*, which has not hitherto been worth a penny to any man whose pence are so scarce as a laborer's, and which has made repeated attacks on the ordinary working-class organizations without whose co-operation Socialists can at present do nothing except cry in

the wilderness. The branches are expected to sell this paper at their meetings. Now I hope no Fabian tract at present in the market is worth less than a penny, or is calculated to give needless offence to any of our allies. As to a paper, we recognize that a workman expects for his penny a week a newspaper as big and as full of general news as any of the regular Sunday papers. Therefore our policy has been to try to induce some of these regular papers to give a column or two to Socialism, calling it by what name they please. And I have no hesitation in saying that the effect of this policy as shewn in the *Manchester Sunday Chronicle*, the *Star*, the *London Daily Chronicle*, and other more exclusively working-class papers, notably *The Clarion*, has done more for the cause than all the time and money that has been wasted on *Justice* since the *Star* was founded. *Fabian News* does everything for us that *Justice* does for the Federation; but what would you think of us if we invited you to offer it for a penny to the man in the street as the leading organ of Social-Democracy in England? Our mission is to Socialize the Press as we hope to Socialize Parliament and the other Estates of the realm, not to run the Press ourselves.

Finally, how has the Federation policy succeeded as a means of maintaining discipline and solidarity in its own ranks? Evidently not at all. First came the secession of the Socialist League, in which they lost their greatest man, William Morris, besides Andreas Scheu, Belfort Bax, the late C. J. Faulkner, Robert Banner, E. T. Craig (of Ralahine fame), Bland, Aveling, Mrs. Marx-Aveling, and others. But they retained Helen Taylor, John Burns, Champion, and Tom Mann. Not one of these remain with them. Now look at the Fabian record. Our first regular Executive Council was that appointed to serve from January 1885 to April 1886. The names are Pease, Bland, Shaw, Webb, and Mrs. Wilson. To them we added Mrs. Besant and Podmore in 1886, Olivier and Phillips in 1887, Graham Wallas and William Clarke in 1888. Look at the Executive of to-day, and you find Webb, Bland, Shaw, Pease, Olivier and Wallas there still; and you would find Podmore, Phillips and Clarke but for the fact that they voluntarily withdrew in favor of members who were better able to attend the Executive meetings. They are still available whenever they are called upon. Mrs. Wilson is the only one whom we have lost through any political incompatibility; for Mrs. Besant's loss is a grief which we share with all the advanced societies in London except the Theosophic Society. We are a regular old gang. But if you consider that we are all persons of tolerably strong individuality, and very diverse temperaments, and take that along with the fact that no one of us is strong enough to impose his will on the rest, or weak enough to allow himself to be overridden, you will, I think, allow me to claim our escape from the quarrels which rent asunder both the Federation and the League as a proof that our methods stand the test of experience in the matter of keeping our forces together.

In saying all this, I have had to be a little hard on the S.D.F., the rank and file of which are for the most part our very good friends,

as they shew by the freedom with which they help us and invite us to help them in any convenient way without the slightest regard to the denunciations of us in which *Justice* periodically indulges. On our side we take no offence and bear no grudge, knowing too well how often our success has been made easy by their exertions in breaking ground for us. But I think you will now see that it is impossible for us ever to amalgamate with the Social-Democratic Federation whilst it remains a federation, or to recommend any of our local Societies to venture on such a step. If such an amalgamation ever takes place, it will come about by branches of the Federation from time to time throwing off the leading strings of that body and combining with the other Socialists of the town, including the Fabians, to form a local independent Socialist Society.

Scientific Class Warfare.

But however we may combine or divide our forces, our tactics must always depend on our strength at the moment. At present it is good tactics for the United States to bully Chili; but it would be bad tactics for Portugal to bully England. It is good tactics to run a Labor candidate at Battersea: it would be folly to run one at Hampstead. If the numbers of the Fabian Society in any constituency ever rise to the point of making the result of the election depend on the Fabian vote, that Society will not only run Fabian candidates, but will run them with a highhandedness that will astonish even the Federation. It may be said, roughly, that the tactics of the Fabian Society will change with every additional thousand of its members. Only, remember, the addition must be a real addition. Our rolls of membership must not be padded with the names of dead-heads who join in a fit of short-lived enthusiasm, and drop off after three weeks. In London we have always kept up a system of periodical purging so as to make our roll represent our real strength. If a member disappears for any length of time, or ceases to subscribe, he is asked whether he has changed his mind, and is struck off if his reply is not satisfactory. Thus our first rule is not to try and deceive ourselves as to our power. I will not pretend that we are always as scrupulous in the matter of enlightening other people. Though we have never deceived the public by overstating our numbers, we have not always insisted on undeceiving them when they shewed a disposition to make concessions to us which they would perhaps have thought twice about if their notions of our bulk had been derived from our official records instead of from their imaginations. But in politics as in the game of poker, bluffing belongs only to the early days of the game. The moment you go to the poll, all concealment is at an end. When the Social-Democratic Federation consisted of about forty members, the *Church Review* estimated them at about 4,000; and it was possible then to laugh at the *Church Review* with an air which conveyed to the superstitious that 40,000 would have been nearer the mark. But after 1885 there was an end of that,

just as there will be an end, after the coming general election, of all romantic notions about the influence of the Fabian. In 1888 it only cost us twenty-eight postcards written by twenty-eight members to convince the newly-born *Star* newspaper that London was aflame with Fabian Socialism. In 1893 twenty-eight dozen postcards will not frighten the greenest editor in London into giving us credit for an ounce over our real weight. The School Board election has robbed us of half our imaginary terrors; the County Council election may take away the rest; the General election will finish the bluffing element in our tactics for ever.* No more unearned increment of prestige for us then; for though rumor may count us at two hundred to the score, the returning-officer will count us strictly at twelve to the dozen, and publish the results where everyone will read them. Thenceforth we shall play with our cards on the table. Our business will then be, not to talk crudely about the Class War, with very cloudy notions as to the positions of the two camps and the uniforms of the two armies (both of which, by-the-bye, will sport red flags), but to organize it scientifically so that we shall drain the opposite host of every combatant whose interests really lie with ours. The day has gone by for adopting Fergus O'Connor's favorite test of the unshaven chin, the horny hand, and the fustian jacket as the true distinctive mark of the soldier of liberty. Nor will the Trade-Unionist test of having at some time done manual work for weekly wages serve us. Such distinctions date from the days when even the ability to read and write was so scarce, and commanded so high a price both in money and social status, that the educated man belonged economically to the classes and not to the masses. Nowadays the Board Schools have changed all that. The commercial clerk, with his reading, his writing, his arithmetic and his shorthand, is a proletarian, and a very miserable proletarian, only needing to be awakened from his poor little superstition of shabby gentility to take his vote from the Tories and hand it over to us. The small tradesmen and rate-payers who are now allying themselves with the Duke of Westminster in a desperate and unavailing struggle against the rising rates entailed by the eight hours day and standard wages for all public servants, besides great extensions of corporate activity in providing accommodation and education at the public expense, must sooner or later see that their interest lies in making common cause with the workers to throw the burden of taxation directly on to unearned incomes, and to secure for capable organizers of industry the prestige, the pensions, and the permanence and freedom from anxiety and competition which municipal employment offers. The professional men of no more than ordinary ability, struggling with one another for work in

* This anticipation has fortunately not been justified by the event. Six members of the Fabian Society are now members of the County Council; and it is not too much to claim that the result of the General Election upset every estimate of the political situation except the Fabian one. See the preface to the 1892 edition of Fabian Tract No. 11, "The Workers' Political Program."

the overstocked professions, are already becoming far more tired of Unsocialism and Competition than the dock laborers are, because revivals of trade bring them no intervals of what they consider good times. In short, all men except those who possess either exceptional ability or property which brings them in a considerable unearned income, or both, stand to lose instead of to win by Unsocialism ; and sooner or later they must find this out and throw in their lot with us. Therefore to exclude middle-class and professional men from our ranks is not "scientific Socialism" at all, but the stupidest sort of class prejudice. It would be far more sensible to exclude those skilled artisans who make several pounds a week ; work overtime with reckless selfishness ; and have even been known to refuse to employ laborers belonging to unions. But there is no need to exclude anybody. The real danger is that since we are certain to have an increasing number of professional men, tradesmen, clerks, journalists and the like in our ranks, these men may by their superior education, or rather their superior literateness—which is not exactly the same thing—and by their more polished manners, be chosen too often as candidates at elections and as committee-men. This would be a most fatal mistake ; for it is of the first importance that all our candidates and executive council-men should be the ablest men in the movement, whereas the presumption must always be that our recruits from the professions and from business would not have joined us if they had not lacked the exceptional energy and practical turn which still enable men to make fortunes, or at least very comfortable incomes, in those classes. To become a Fabian agitator would hardly be looked on as promotion by Sir Charles Russell, or Mr. Whiteley, or the President of the Royal Academy, or a physician or dentist earning £1,500 a year. Speaking for myself as a professional man, claiming to be able to do a somewhat special class of work, I may say that the more my ability becomes known, the more do I find myself pressed to spend my time in shovelling guineas into my pocket instead of writing Fabian papers, attending to the Fabian Executive work, lecturing, revising or compiling tracts, and writing papers like the present. My case is a typical one ; and it shews that if the working-classes run after middle-class men as representatives, they will have to choose between pecuniarily disinterested men and men who are discontented because they are not clever enough to get their fill of work or money in their professions or businesses. Now, though every clever and warmhearted young gentleman bachelor enjoys from two to ten years of disinterestedness, during which good work can be got from him, yet in the long run he gets tired of being disinterested. *Permanently* disinterested men of ability are very scarce : it is easier to find a thousand men who will sacrifice valuable chances in life once than to find a single man who will do it twice. And average duffers, though plentiful, are not to be trusted with the generalship of so great a campaign as ours. Consequently, the workers should make it a rule always to choose one of their own class as a candidate or councilman, except when the middle-class candidate has given special proofs

of his ability and disinterestedness. This is why I myself have so often urged working-class audiences to believe in themselves and not run after the tall hats and frock coats. It is only the clever wage-workman to whom political leadership in the workman's cause comes as a promotion.

My task, I am happy to say, is now done. You know what we have gone through, and what you will probably have to go through. You know why we believe that the middle-classes will have their share in bringing about Socialism, and why we do not hold aloof from Radicalism, Trade-Unionism, or any of the movements which are traditionally individualistic. You know, too, that none of you can more ardently desire the formation of a genuine Collectivist political party, distinct from Conservative and Liberal alike, than we do. But I hope you also know that there is not the slightest use in merely expressing your aspirations unless you can give us some voting power to back them, and that your business in the provinces is, in one phrase, to create that voting power. Whilst our backers at the polls are counted by tens, we must continue to crawl and drudge and lecture as best we can. When they are counted by hundreds we can permeate and trim and compromise. When they rise to tens of thousands we shall take the field as an independent party. Give us hundreds of thousands, as you can if you try hard enough, and we will ride the whirlwind and direct the storm.

POSTSCRIPT.

The lapse of time between the reading of the above paper and its publication, makes it necessary, in justice to the Social-Democratic Federation, to add a few words. The explanation of the delay is very simple : a glance back at pages 5 and 6 will shew that their publication on the eve of the General Election might have injured the prospects of the two Federation candidates who were in the field. The close of the polls has not only set the Fabian Society free to issue this tract ; it has also apparently convinced the S.D.F. of the practically reactionary effect of its sectarian tactics. The victory of Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji, the official Liberal candidate for Central Finsbury, who won by a majority of three only, was secured by the votes of the Clerkenwell branch of the S.D.F., which very sensibly threw off its allegiance to the central council and "went Fabian" for the occasion in flat defiance of the S.D.F. manifesto calling on the workers to vote for none but Social-Democratic candidates. Instead of a sentence of excommunication, there came from headquarters the following utterance in *Justice* (No. 444, 16th July, 1892), presumably from the pen of Mr. Belfort Bax, who was then acting as editor.

PRINCIPLES AND THEIR APPLICATION.

Talking about Naoroji affords us an opportunity of seconding the point mentioned in the letter above referred to, namely, as to the desirability on special occasions of relaxing the generally excellent principle of not voting or working for either side. The laxity we complained of last week which is shown by members of the S.D.F. who get the "election fever" in throwing themselves indiscriminately into the struggle on the Radical side irrespective of the programme or the candidate is undoubtedly due to the slightly pedantic attitude sometimes taken up on this point. Now the pollings are over we do not hesitate to say that we think that the *non possumus* rule should have been relaxed in the North Lambeth election for the purpose of keeping Stanley out, and thereby checkmating the designs of the British East Africa Company, even at the expense of assisting a colorless Radical nonentity to obtain the seat ; and also in Central Finsbury, both as a demonstration against the conduct of official Liberalism and for the sake of getting a friendly outsider the chance of bringing the claims of the people of India for the first time prominently before the larger British public. If you give a Social Democrat some, at least more

or less, useful work in an election, you keep him out of the mischief of squandering his time in promiscuous assistance to worthless Liberals. For it is not given to every man during the excitement of election times to be able to twirl his thumbs and repeat the obvious Socialist truism that one political party is as bad as the other, as the Moslem reiterates the well-worn and doubtless to him equally certain dictum, "Allah is great." There may be a zeal of principle, "but not with discretion." We take it there is no compromise in a momentary alliance with any party for the purpose of carrying an important point. This is a very different thing from the principle of "permeation" advocated by the Fabians.

The recantation in the last sentence but one is complete. The last sentence means only that since *Justice* has given the Fabian dog a bad name, it feels bound to go on hanging him in spite of its tardy discovery of his good qualities.

I do not know whether this declaration of Opportunism is anything more than a passing excuse for the action of the insurgent branch. It would, however, be clearly unfair to allow pages 21 and 22 to become public without mentioning it.

July, 1892.

G. B. S.

BASIS OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

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It therefore aims at the re-organization of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit. In this way only can the natural and acquired advantages of the country be equitably shared by the whole people.

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